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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001600

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DOE FOR GEORGE PERSON

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [EFIN](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: DELTA OFFICIALS BRIEF U/S JEFFERY ON
EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THEIR STATES' CHALLENGES

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b
& d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Officials from Delta and Rivers states briefed Under Secretary Jeffery July 24 during his visit to Abuja on the current situation in the Niger Delta, specific security concerns, oil bunkering, and what each government is doing in response to increased lawlessness in the area. Representatives requested USG assistance in creating economic opportunities and building the capacity of law enforcement and the state assemblies. Ambassador informed the officials that a team from the U.S. Mission would engage with their respective governments to develop a way forward. END SUMMARY.

SECURITY

¶2. (C) During a July 24 roundtable discussion concerning the Niger Delta, Ambassador and Under Secretary Jeffery heard from Bayelsa State Governor Timipre Sylva, Bayelsa Commissioner for Employment Maxwell Oko and the Chief of Staff-equivalent to the Governor of Rivers State Magnus Abe on the challenges facing their states. Sylva asserted that press reports greatly exaggerated the situation and that it was "not complicated at all," adding that as long as U.S. travel advisories kept American citizens out of the region, we would never truly understand it. Abe said that pulling back from the region would not help the situation, but rather make it worse. When Ambassador pointed out that an Amcit had been kidnapped only one month prior, Sylva agreed that was a "breach," but contended the incident was "a mistake," and not that serious because the Amcit was released almost immediately. Ambassador noted the responsibility the USG has for the safety of our citizens, and for keeping them informed about security issues. Both Sylva and Abe acknowledged that they must find a way to convince investors their safety is guaranteed if investment is to increase.

¶3. (C) Sylva and Abe claimed that the historic origins of the conflicts in Bayelsa and Rivers States were markedly different, even if their current circumstances appeared similar. While Sylva said ethnic tension was the original root cause of the violence in Bayelsa State, Abe contrasted that situation with militants operating in Rivers State, who were not ideologues, but criminals who simply took advantage of the lawlessness in the region. Both Sylva and Abe agreed that increased economic opportunities for young people and capacity building within law enforcement were keys to resolving the security concerns. Additionally, Sylva

described efforts in Bayelsa State to convince some militant commanders to demobilize, and inquired about possible USG assistance, e.g. advice on weapons disposal, though they noted that the federal government very much had the lead on law enforcement and weapons control aspects of the problem. Ambassador noted that the Mission had previously offered such assistance and was awaiting responses from the GON.

14. (C) When Ambassador inquired how Rivers State, which, like all Nigerian States lacks its own law enforcement agency, would fight criminality, Abe replied that although both law enforcement and the military were ultimately the federal government's responsibility, Rivers State government bought new equipment for the police assigned to the state and paid them extra allowances (in addition to their police salary) to keep them motivated. Sylva added that since states cannot tell the police what to do, it is the federal government's responsibility to enforce peace.

OIL BUNKERING AND RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION

15. (C) Sylva claimed oil theft (known as "bunkering") did not occur often within Bayelsa State, but rather along its borders with Rivers and Delta States, and the state government had made great efforts to stop it. He claimed that the domestic bunkering of (home brewed) refined petroleum products (as opposed to crude oil) occurred due to inefficiencies in the domestic fuel delivery system. According to Sylva, product does not reach the rural people because the terrain makes it financially difficult for the Pipelines and Products Marketing Company (PPMC) to deliver

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fuel to filling stations in certain areas. Abe stressed the importance of resource distribution, maintaining that the system of oil revenues and other payments going to the federal government (despite large sums being returned to the Delta) caused "deep disaffection" among the communities of the Delta. As an example, Abe complained that the pollution tax paid by corporations went to the federal government, not the states or villages where the pollution actually occurred.

BAYELSA STATE PLAN

16. (C) Sylva described the criminal elements in Bayelsa State as "clever" for building their own camps within existing communities (and in one case inside the grounds of a school), making it difficult for the Joint Task Force (JTF) or police to get to them without harming civilians. Sylva added that neither the JTF nor the police were equipped to handle such situations and that special training was needed. Since the military and law enforcement had been unable to achieve any success, Sylva said his government came up with a new plan called the Triple E: engagement, empowerment, and education. Sylva explained how his engagement with the militant leader Joshua Mac'Iver led to a peace agreement and the demobilization of his camp. Sylva said he is working on similar arrangements with other camps, including one led by Victor Ebikabowei.

17. (C) To empower the young members of the camps after they laid down their arms, Sylva said that Bayelsa State instituted a "social welfare" program where a stipend is paid to the camp members to assist with their rehabilitation. To further empower the youths of his state, Sylva said that 34 billion naira (\$290 million) Bayelsa State received from the excess crude account was being appropriated to build three state-of-the-art secondary schools, accommodating 1500 students each, to realign with the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Sylva noted the current "success rate" (presumably job placement and university enrollment rate) for students coming out of secondary school was only 13%, while the other 87% were not qualified to go to university or to apply for most jobs. To assist with the rehabilitation of the demobilized youths, Sylva highlighted his state's partnership with UNDP in creating the Local

Content Institute which would provide skills training for oil industry jobs. Sylva noted the importance of skills acquisition training for the youths from the camps, whom he described as the "bottom of the food chain" and not currently worthy of holding a job.

RIVERS STATE PLAN

¶18. (C) Abe commented that as long as the reward for criminality is greater than the consequences, the lawlessness would continue. He added that long term punishment would help, but only providing alternatives ultimately would stop youths from joining criminal camps. Although slightly different from Bayelsa's Triple E plan, Rivers State is also implementing a three-prong approach: revival of a sense of community spirit, rehabilitation, and reconciliation. Abe described the creation of community watch programs where 2,000 citizens were trained to spot criminal behavior. In an effort to reach youths before recruitment, Rivers State will choose 100 secondary school students to be sent to the best schools in Nigeria. Abe also said that the state is offering 6 billion naira (\$51 million) in scholarships to send 300 students to university in the UK. According to Abe, the state also created a Rehabilitation Committee, chaired by a former Director of the State Security Service, to design and implement rehabilitation projects. Abe said reaching out to those not involved in the community and rehabilitating youths would lead to reconciliation. (NOTE: Abe did not elaborate on how exactly his program would reconcile local-level conflict over scarce resources. END NOTE.)

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

¶19. (C) Sylva said the USG could help with these plans by providing "the equipment, training, and teachers) not the money." Both Sylva and Abe concurred on the need for law

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enforcement capacity building and the creation of economic opportunities. In response to Ambassador's concern over transparency, Sylva replied that his state recently created the Bayelsa Expenditure & Income Transparency Initiative and began posting state government budgets on the state website. (COMMENT: The Bayelsa State website is www.bayelsa.gov.ng; however, no links are provided to the initiative and no budget information could be found in our scan of the site. END COMMENT.) According to Sylva, Bayelsa also started a Due Process and Good Governance Unit that discovered most projects were overpriced, which has helped the state government save money. Abe added that Rivers State had promised 100% budget implementation and has begun to follow through. USAID Mission Director highlighted the ongoing efforts by the USG in both Bayelsa and Rivers States and inquired as to how USAID could further help. Both Sylva and Abe highlighted a need for capacity building within the state assemblies, specifically in the areas of transparency and fiscal responsibility.

A WAY FORWARD

¶10. (C) The Ambassador informed both Sylva and Abe that the U.S. Mission would develop an operational strategy for each state and meet with their respective executive offices to discuss areas for cooperation. Due to the expense and difficulty in traveling to the Delta, Ambassador inquired about meeting in Lagos or again in Abuja. Noting that one cannot administer aid effectively from the outside, Sylva agreed to meet in Lagos or Abuja if discussions also included plans for a future visit to Bayelsa State. Abe, however, reiterated his state government's policy that those interested in doing work in Rivers State must come to Rivers State.

¶11. (U) This cable was cleared by Under Secretary Jeffery's staff.
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